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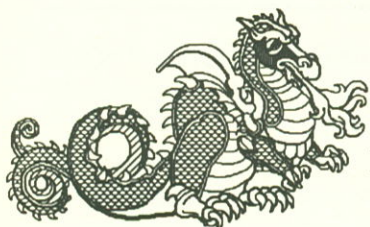
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If You're Hot You're Hot

Key Changes Over 30 Years in Publishing: Reflections of a Pioneer Book Marketer

by **Nat Bodian** (Publishing Consultant)

Against the Grain has asked me to talk, briefly, about some of the changes I've seen in publishing during my active publishing career over the past 30 years. In the paragraphs following, in no particular order, I will attempt to comply.

1. Proliferation of Books Published: Despite repeated cries about the death of the book, more and more books continue to be published each year. As knowledge and information expands, the market for books, too, will continue to expand in the foreseeable future.

2. Vast Increase in Book Pricing: Book prices continue to rise and there seems no way of stopping this. By contrast, when I was head of sales and promotion at Baker & Taylor in the late 1950s, the average list price of all books we had shipped in a recent year was \$2.95. This, of course, included a large percentage of juveniles and a relatively minute percentage of professional and reference titles. Children's "books in print" was a hand-out with a \$3.00 price label on it, and *Books in Print*, as I recall, was about \$18.95.

3. Continuation of Publishing Mergers: Big talk in the late 1950s was the large number of mergers in the publishing industry. This continues even 30 years later and seems a way of life. Large publishers, apparently, find it convenient for a smaller company to develop a publishing specialty

over 20, 30 or 40 years, and then buy it up in one fell swoop by taking over the smaller company—or at least its list—in a single purchase. Dollars continue to substitute for list development.

4. Improvement in Library Services by Jobbers: At Baker & Taylor in 1959, we prided ourselves on being the leading supplier of services to libraries. But today, library suppliers offer numerous additional services to libraries which were unthinkable 30 years ago. Perhaps the greatest advance in library services in the past 30 years was the introduction of the Approval Plan, pioneered by Richard Abel (aided by Lyman Newlin). Today, these plans, offered by more than a dozen excellent suppliers, are the backbone of many library acquisition programs—particularly in the academic area.

5. Decrease in Publishers Publishing Books About Publishing: In distant years, R.R. Bowker called itself "The Publisher's Publisher." Today, Bowker has abandoned that roll. Today, no medium to large publisher to my knowledge has any program of publishing books for the publishing industry. True, Bowker still has two of my titles in print (*Book Marketing Handbook*, Vols. 1 and 2), and Oryx Press in Phoenix has four more of my titles in print (*Copywriter's Handbook*, *Publisher's Direct Mail Handbook*,

Bodian's Publishing Desk Reference, and *How to Choose a Winning Title*). However, neither of the two seems interested at present in taking on any new titles for this somewhat limited market.

6. Growth of the Small, Independent Publisher: As it has become increasingly difficult to get published by the medium to larger houses, there has been a proliferation of small, independent houses—often started by an author of a single book—but with others added. Much of the quality publishing today is being done by small presses affiliated with COSMEP: The International Association of Independent Publishers (PO Box 703, San Francisco, CA 94101), and with PMA: Publishers Marketing Association (2401 Pacific Coast Hwy, Hermosa Beach, CA 90254).

7. Increased Recognition of Marketing by Publishers: Perhaps one of the greatest advances I've seen in Publishing in 30 years is the increased recognition by publishers of professionalism in book marketing and the willingness of publishers to pay more for such professionalism. Marketing, when I entered book publishing, was a 'fly-by-the-seat-of-the-pants' operation. A marketer was appointed, usually at very low salary, and often with no prior experience, and, after a year

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of dismal performance, usually replaced by another low-salaried person. Subsequently, with a year's experience, the 'fired' employee was able to trade up to a slightly better paying job. Today, there is a high level of professionalism in book marketing with accompanying computer knowledge and data base experience. Needless to say, pioneering books like *Book Marketing Handbook*, which, for the first time defined book marketing and its techniques, helped pave the way to today's highly skilled professional.

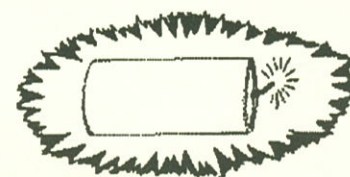
8. Use of Computers in Publishing and Publishing Marketing: It goes almost without saying that the biggest and most revolutionary change in 30 years in

publishing and in publishing marketing has been the computer. Would you believe that, except for the office calculator in the comptroller's office, there was no computer at Baker & Taylor in 1959! Today, library suppliers/jobbers are totally computerized and offer many sophisticated services made possible by the computer, and market by computer. The vast advances in publisher direct mail, for example, have been largely possible due to computerized customer and prospect databases which enable publishers to pinpoint prospects.

In these few short paragraphs, I've skimmed the surface of what I perceive to have been some of the major changes in publishing since I

entered the field in the late 1950s as head of sales and promotion at Baker & Taylor.

I'm confident that other publishing 'old-timers'—certainly Lyman Newlin, whose publishing experience vastly exceeds mine (by more than a score of years, at least) will not only agree, but also be able to add even more changes that they have witnessed that make publishing (and yes, librarianship) the vital, exciting, and essential lynchpin of the exploding information age. ✎



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